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Pattern of conferences

Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

Meetings held by regional and other major groupings are provided with interpretation services on an "as available" basis, that is, from existing resources not used owing to the cancellation of meetings of calendar bodies. Certain measures can be taken to improve the likelihood of services being made available and there has been an increase in the percentage of meetings provided with interpretation over the three-year period under review. The rise in requests for conference facilities outside of normal hours continued, and included requests for interpretation services.

* A/55/150.
** The present report covers statistics for the period up to 30 June 2000.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions 50/206 A of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide, within the resources approved for conference services in the bienniums 1996-1997 and 1998-1999, interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, taking into account the priority due to meetings included in the calendar of conferences and meetings, and to submit a report on the implementation of those decisions to the General Assembly, respectively, at its fifty-first and fifty-second sessions through the Committee on Conferences. The Committee fulfilled its reporting requirement through its annual reports to the Assembly. A further report on the item (A/53/826) was issued in accordance with paragraph 31 of Assembly resolution 53/208 of 18 December 1998, and the most recent report was A/54/208.

2. Furthermore, in paragraph 11 of its resolution 54/248 B, the General Assembly decided to include all necessary resources in the budget for the ensuing biennium to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision.

3. The present report, submitted pursuant to the above-mentioned request, contains statistics of meetings of regional and other major groupings held from beginning July 1999 to end June 2000, including a breakdown by regional group.

4. The General Assembly has mandated the Secretariat to make provision in its requests for resources for the servicing of such groups, while at the same time maintaining its decision that services should be provided on an as available basis, that is, without any servicing capacity being specifically allocated for that purpose.

5. The manner in which the Secretariat has addressed these mandates has derived from the actual practice of calendar bodies. Every biennium, several hundred meetings are planned for in its capacity requirements and eventually scheduled. Cancellations of calendar body meetings reduce the number of meetings actually held, thus freeing capacity to service regional and other major groupings.

II. Data

6. For the period 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000, all of the 41 requests for provision of conference services to regional and other major groupings were met at Geneva, or a total of 100 per cent.

7. With regard to New York, for the period 1 July 1999 to 30 June 2000, 100 per cent of the 1,194 requests for facilities alone were met. The need for groups to meet outside of traditional working hours continued. In fact, it has escalated owing to the increased volume of calendar and other intergovernmental meetings taking place within the traditional time-frame. As to provision of interpretation services, out of 321 requests, 269 were met, or a total of 84 per cent. At peak periods, however, some meetings were scheduled and provided with services outside of regular working hours, especially after 6 p.m.

8. The main difficulty in providing services during this 12-month period was caused by: (a) an increase in the number of scheduled meetings over previous years, including heavy activity prior to and in preparation for two special sessions of the General Assembly; (b) an increase in the number of meetings with interpretation requested by the Group of 77, although this was somewhat offset by a reduction in requests by some regional groups; and, lastly, (c) a growing tendency towards lengthier meetings of the Security Council and additional meetings of its working groups (62, for example, in the month of June). The latter, of course, is very difficult to predict.

9. A comparative table of statistics for the three reporting periods follows:

	Interpretation services			*Conference facilities*	
	Requested	*Provided*	*Not provided*	*Requested*	*Provided*
July 1999-June 2000	321	269	52	1 194	1 194
July 1998-June 1999	314	262	52	909	909
July 1997-June 1998	348	283	65	535	535
Breakdown by regional group, July 1999-June 2000, Geneva					
Group of 77	18	18	-	18	18
African Group	8	8	-	8	8
Asian Group	1	1	-	1	1
Latin American and Caribbean Group	13	13	-	13	13
Islamic Group (OIC)	1	1	-	1	1
Breakdown by regional group, July 1999-June 2000, New York					
Group of 77	162	135	27	650	650
Non-Aligned Movement	28	20	8	110	110
African Group	50	37	13	119	119
Asian Group	13	12	1	15	15
Latin American and Caribbean Group	16	15	1	16	16
Western European and Other States Group	16	15	1	16	16
Arab Group	-	-	-	89	89
Alliance of Small Island States	-	-	-	1	1
Association of Caribbean States	2	2	-	2	2
Association of Southeast Asian Nations	2	2	-	6	6
Caribbean Community	-	-	-	7	7
Commonwealth States	-	-	-	2	2
Eastern European Group	-	-	-	13	13
Economic Community of Western African States	5	5	-	5	5
European Community	1	1	-	1	1

	Interpretation services			*Conference facilities*	
	Requested	*Provided*	*Not provided*	*Requested*	*Provided*
Central American Group	-	-	-	5	5
Islamic Group (OIC)	7	6	1	8	8
Joint Coordinating Committee of Group of 77 and Non-Aligned Movement	7	7	-	7	7
JUSCANZ (Japan, United States, Canada and New Zealand)	-	-	-	89	89
Landlocked Countries	3	3	-	4	4
Least Developed Countries	1	1	-	2	2
Rio Group	6	6	-	10	10
Southern African Development Community	-	-	-	8	8
South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation	2	2	-	4	4
South Pacific Forum	-	-	-	4	4

10. In order to provide services and facilities whenever possible to regional and other major groupings, the Planning and Meetings Servicing Section continued to work closely with the secretaries/organizers of calendar or other meetings with confirmed services so as to have adequate notice of cancellations or other instances where services might not be needed for the full three-hour block. By providing this information ahead of time, more regional groups, which often meet for less than three hours, were able to receive the services they needed. Coordinating this information with the regional groups is the key to providing interpretation when conference services are so stretched.

11. Although the percentages improved from the beginning to the end of the reporting period, there were actually more requests for interpretation, and it was provided more often, during the first year. This is partly explained by the larger volume of scheduled and other intergovernmental meetings in 1999, as mentioned in paragraph 8 above, and to the relative shortage of facilities in the most recent reporting period. Most regional groups do not wish to meet outside of traditional meeting hours.

12. Comparative statistics for previous years by regional group are not available. Anecdotally, however, it is noted that one major grouping of Member States at times convened two or more meetings a day, with interpretation, during the last reporting period. In one particular week, a total of 18 such meetings with services were held, most of them in connection with ongoing sessions. This level of provision could not always be sustained, however, which led to their meeting on occasion with interpretation after regular working hours when this service was crucial to the work and could not be provided at any other time.

III. Conclusion

13. The percentage of meetings held by regional and other major groupings that were provided with interpretation for the period recorded here has risen steadily from 81 per cent during the period 1997-1998 to 84 per cent for the current period, that is, July 1999 to June 2000. An even more flexible approach towards scheduling meetings could have resulted in a higher percentage of services provided, coupled with the vigilance of intergovernmental organizations in planning their meetings well in advance and, whenever possible, releasing unused services. This is still the crucial factor which would enable the most efficient utilization of resources.